

# Iqbál\* and the Bábí-Bahá'í Faith

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Every reader of Iqbál's *magnum opus*, the *Jávidnáma* (published in Lahore 1932), has been delighted to read in one of the most prominent places this epic, Ṭáhirih's song:

گر تو افتدم نظر چهره به چهره روبرو  
شرح دهم غم ترا کنت به بکنه موبو

But one also wonders why the poet introduced Ṭáhirih among the three immortal spirits whom he meets in the Sphere of Jupiter, that is Ḥalláj, Ghálib, and Ṭáhirih Qurratu'l-'Ayn. During his flight through the heavens, which is administered by Mauláná Rúmí, the poet reaches the various spheres in which heavenly beings abide and discusses with them problems of life and death, of religion and politics. It is in the *Falak-i mushtarí* that the poet sees three spirits, called by him *pákbáz*, "those who have given away everything" for their ideals, three people in whose breasts a fire is raging that can burn the whole world.

آتش اندر سینه شان گیتی گداز

This description certainly applies to Ḥalláj, the martyr-mystic of Baghdad, and to Ṭáhirih, but it is difficult to find the reason for also introducing Ghálib, the poet of Delhi whose Urdu *Díván* had become such a treasure for every lover of the Urdu language. However, Ghálib appears in this context in connection not with his superb poetry but rather with another important theological problem, a problem concerning the possible continuation of prophethood after

\* Muḥammad Iqbál (d. 1938) was one of the more influential Muslim thinkers of the first half of the twentieth century. He was a scholar taking a degree at Cambridge in 1923, a poet, and a philosopher. He wrote in English, Persian, and Urdu.

Muḥammad. Muḥammad had been called, in the Qur'án, the "Seal of the Prophets" (*khátam al-nabíyin*). About the year 1829, Indian Muslim theologians discussed the question of whether or not God can create another Muḥammad if God should create another world. Ghálíb's verse written at that occasion states that wherever a new world arises, there would be also *rahmatan li'l-'álamín*, a prophet sent as "mercy for the Universe" (Qur'án 21:107). This verse constitutes the focal point of Ghálíb's appearance in Iqbál's description of the Sphere of Jupiter—that is, he is called as a timid witness of the possibility of a continuation of revelation; as someone who knows that behind the surface of a poetic statement of this kind there may be hidden the borderline of "infidelity," and this can be interpreted as pertaining to the appearance of a religious movement that is based on the concept of such a "continuation of revelation."

Iqbál describes the three spirits as wearing tulip-colored garments—for in Persian and Turkish poetic imagery the tulip has been regarded as the flower of suffering and martyrdom. Thus, both Ḥalláj and Ṭáhirih show the secret of their martyrdom in their red garments, which remind the poet of the blood they shed as witnesses to the truth or to their unshakable faith; therefore, he sees their faces likewise radiating an inner fire, the fire of fearless love. The three noble spirits, as he describes them, are in a state of glow and fever from the day of the primordial covenant where they imbibed the wine of divine love, and they appear to him still intoxicated by their own songs of passion.

In such words, Iqbál expresses his amazement at their sight. But his mystical guide, Mauláná Rúmí, consoles him and at the same time admonishes him not to lose himself completely by gazing at them but rather to be quickened by the fiery melodies of their song. And he tells his disciple:

Have you never seen fearless longing? Then look!  
 Have you never seen the power of this wine? Then look!  
Ghálíb and Ḥalláj and the Persian lady  
 Have cast excitement into the sanctuary's soul!  
 These songs grant firmness to the spirit,  
 For their fire comes from the innermost heart of creation.

That is how Iqbál introduces the three martyrs (or rather two, for Ghálíb lived happily until he died in Delhi in 1869). Upon this, each of the three sings a *ghazal* that in the case of Ḥalláj is invented by Iqbál, while both Ghálíb and Ṭáhirih are quoted with original poems—and there is no doubt that Ṭáhirih's famous lines:

گر تو افتدم نظر چهره به چهره رو برو  
 شخ و هم غم ترا مکتب بر کتفه موبو

are among the high points of the *Jávídnáma*.

How did Iqbal become acquainted with Ṭáhirih Qurratu'l-'Ayn, and what is the reason for his admiration for the Bábí martyr? We have to go back twenty-five years to 1907 in Munich when he wrote his dissertation, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*. This study was the first of its kind in that it attempted to trace the development of Persian thought from the days of Zoroaster through Mani and Mazdak into Islamic times and to set forth a picture of the Greek influences on Islamic philosophy and the reaction of Persian thinkers to these influences, as well as discussing the typically Persian solutions of the problem of the relation between God and the world. His material was primarily gathered from manuscripts in Great Britain and Berlin, and his then prevailing tendency to a more pantheistic worldview can be understood from various formulations, including his praise of Ibn 'Arabí. Still deeply under the influence of his British teacher, the neo-Hegelian McTaggart, Iqbal explained many phenomena of Islamic thought in Hegelian categories. For this reason, he refuted some of the ideas expressed in this dissertation in later years when he had turned away from Hegel and had become infatuated with the vitalists and when Ibn 'Arabí was no longer one of his Oriental guides but rather Rúmí, whose original dynamism Iqbal had discovered after counting him among the pantheists in his thesis. Ḥalláj, then, in 1932 the true hero of the Sphere of Jupiter, appears in the dissertation as representative of a "widely pantheistic" Sufism, and his *aná'l-ḥaqq* "I am the Creative Truth" is seen, in consonance with the judgment of several European scholars, as an Islamic counterpart of Vedanta speculation (new edition, p. 89).

But there are also germs of ideas in the dissertation, which were later to grow into new, typically Iqbalian thought structures. The emphasis Iqbal laid on Jílí's description of the *insán-i kámil* (perfect human), was to mature into his later ideal of the *mard-i mo'min*, the true believer whose Self, *khudí*, has been developed so highly that the believer can speak to God without inhibition, similar to the Prophet. The dissertation also contains a very interesting, largely positive statement about the Ismá'ílís, and Iqbal emphasizes that with them, Ahriman is "not a malignant creator but breaks up Unity into diversity,"—an idea he was to develop in later years into his very idiosyncratic satanology. It is astonishing, however, that Suhrawardí Maqtúl, the martyr of Aleppo, who was introduced by Iqbal for the first time to Western readers, does not appear in his later work, not even among the martyrs in the Sphere of Jupiter, as much as some of his ideas are dimly reflected in some of Iqbal's concepts (God as light, *et alia*).

After the general survey from Zoroaster to Mullá Ṣadrá comes the surprising last paragraphs of the dissertation, which shall be examined here. Iqbal says:

All the various lines of Persian thought once more find a synthesis in that great religious movement of modern Persia—Babism Baha'ism, which began as a Shí'ah sect, with Mírzá 'Alí Muḥammad Báb of Shiraz and became less and less Islamic in character with the progress of orthodox

persecutions. The origin of the philosophy of this wonderful sect must be sought in the Shí'ah sect of the Shaykhís, the founder of which, Shaykh Aḥmad, was an enthusiastic student of Mullá Ṣadrá's philosophy on which he had written several commentaries. (187)

After a short historical survey of the beginnings of the Bábí movement, Iqbál tries to interpret the philosophy underlying this, in his words, "wonderful" sect. He writes:

The young Persian seer (that is, the Báb), looks upon reality as an essence which brooks no distinction of substance and attribute. The first bounty or self-expansion of the Ultimate Essence, he says, is Existence. Existence is "the known"; "the known" is the essence of "knowledge," "knowledge" is "will," and "will" is "love." Thus from Mullá Ṣadrá's identity of the Known and the Knower, he passes to his conception of the Real as Will and Love. This Primal Love, which he regards as the essence of the Real, is the cause of the manifestation of the Universe which is nothing more than the self-expansion of Love.

One will easily find here the connection between Bábí thought and the traditional Ṣúfí idea that is expressed in a famous ḥadīth qudsí in which God says, "*kuntu kanzan makhfiyyan*" (I was a hidden treasure [and wanted to be known, therefore I created the world.]) The use of the word *love* (*'ishq*) for the innermost essence of the divine, the first Cause of creation, can be traced back to Ḥalláj, for whom this dynamic principle of Love was indeed the very essence of Divine Life, as Louis Massignon has shown convincingly. However, Iqbál's statement about Love in Bábí philosophy leads to his own position in later years: in the introduction to his first Persian *mathnawí*, the *Asrár-i khudí*, published in 1915, he explains his frequent use of the word *'ishq*—"the word is used in a very wide sense and means the desire to assimilate, to absorb. Its highest form is the creation of values and ideals and the endeavour to realize them." Love becomes for Iqbál the true essence of life: it is both "the breath of Gabriel and the heart of Muḥammad Muṣṭafa," as he sings in his great Urdu ode on the Mosque of Cordova, written in 1933. Love in this sense is that power which with its whole existence "destroys what is against love," and must be united with power, a formulation by Paul Tillich to which Iqbál would certainly subscribe.

Iqbál then continues his survey of Bábí philosophy:

The word "creation," with him (i.e., the Báb) does not mean creation out of nothing; since, as the Shaykhís maintain, the word "creator" is not peculiarly applicable to God alone. The Quranic verse, that "God is the best of creators" (Qur'án 23:14) implies that there are other self-manifesting beings like God.

This last sentence looks quite shocking at first sight, but its use is not confined to Iqbál's introduction to the Bábí doctrine. Rather, a few years after completing his dissertation and having radically changed his philosophical stance, the poet-philosopher writes in the introduction of the *Asrár-i khudí* (xviii) that the quranic phrase, *Alláhu aḥsanu'l-khálíqín* (God is the best of creators) "indicates the possibility of other creators than God." That means, he uses here the position of the Shaykhí-Bábí thinkers to point to his favorite idea in those years, that is, that humans too can be creators in their own right—an idea most clearly defined in the famous poem in the *Payám-i mashriq* (1923) when humanity angrily calls to God, claiming that God had created the clay, the desert, and the dark of night, while human beings created from God's raw material the goblet, the gardens, and, to overcome the darkness, the lamp.

In his historical appreciation of Bábí philosophy, Iqbál then continues:

After the execution of 'Alí Muḥammad Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, one of his principal disciples who were collectively called "the First Unity" took up the mission, and proclaimed himself the originator of the new dispensation, the absent Imám whose manifestation the Báb had foretold. He freed the doctrine of his master from its literalistic mysticism, and presented it in a more perfected and systematized form. The Absolute Reality, according to him, is not a person; it is an eternal living Essence, to which we apply the epithets Truth and Love only because they are the highest conceptions known to us. The Living Essence manifests itself through the Universe with the object of creating in itself atoms or centres of consciousness which, as Dr. McTaggart would say, constitute a further determination of the Hegelian Absolute.

Iqbál's allusion to his teacher McTaggart is meaningful in our context, for in one of his articles, Iqbál was later to compare McTaggart to Ḥalláj, the brave defender of the Truth who experienced an extension of normal human consciousness. One may also think of Iqbál's idea concerning the relation between God and the creatures, which, though worded differently, seems to contain a similar image: the world is conceived as an Ego, and everything created is nothing but an Ego, all comprised in the comprehensive Divine Ego (Enver, "Metaphysics of Iqbál" 72). The similarity perhaps becomes clearer when we continue reading Iqbál's account of Bábí thought:

In each of these undifferentiated, simple centres of consciousness, there is hidden a ray of the Absolute Light itself, and the perfection of the spirit consists in gradually actualizing by contact with the individualizing principle—matter, its emotional and intellectual possibilities and thus discovering its own deep being—the ray of eternal Love which is concealed by its union with consciousness. The essence of man, therefore, is not reason or

consciousness; it is this ray of Love—the source of all impulse to noble and unselfish action, which constitutes the real man.

In this paragraph, we read almost a description of Iqbal's own later position, namely the very great emphasis on Love as the moving principle of life. It reminds us of his idea that *khudí*, the true Self, can develop only thanks to the power of Love—that Love which teaches the Self to grow until it reaches its final goal of proximity to the Greatest Self. To wit, he sang in his second Persian *Díván*, the *Zabúr-i 'ajam* (1927):

Only Love can be called a “real Muslim,” because  
it sees the One and advances toward the One,  
while reason has still bound the “infidels” girdle? (Part 2, no. 13)

Iqbal sees, in some allusion to Mullá Şadrá, which is not very clear to me, an “influence of the corporeality of Imagination”:

Reason . . . according to Mullá Şadrá, is not a necessary condition of immortality. . . .

But, according to the Bahá'í teachings as Iqbal interprets them:

. . . in all forms of life there is an immortal spiritual part, the ray of Eternal Love, which has no necessary connection with self-consciousness or reason, and survives after the death of the body.

Here again, we can see some parallels to Iqbal's teaching as he had expounded it, especially in his “Six Lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam” (1930), namely: the Self that is powerful enough to survive the shock of corporeal death (and that happens, as we can easily gather from his poetic utterances about the same topic, when the Self has been strengthened by Love) will continue to live and to develop into higher and higher forms of consciousness. Iqbal, in this respect, seems to agree fully with Bahá'u'lláh whose way of salvation, as contrasted to that taught by Buddha, is described by Iqbal as follows:

Salvation . . . to Bahá'u'lláh lies in the discovery of the essence of love which is hidden in the atoms of consciousness themselves.

And as much as the Buddha and Bahá'u'lláh differ in their attitude toward salvation, yet, as Iqbal continues:

. . . both . . . agree that after death thoughts and characters of man remain, subject to other forces of a similar character, in the spiritual worlds waiting

for another opportunity to find a suitable physical accompaniment in order to continue the process of discovery (Bahá'u'lláh) or destruction (Buddha). To Bahá'u'lláh, the conception of Love is higher than the conception of Will. . . .

However, after some digression into Schopenhauer's thought, Iqbal states—perhaps with some regret—that Bahá'u'lláh, contrary to Schopenhauer who conceives Reality as Will,

does not explain the principle according to which the self-manifestation of the eternal Love is realized in the Universe.

That is how Iqbal's analysis in the last chapter of his dissertation ends—an analysis which is based, as he mentions in a footnote, on Myron Phelps's book on 'Abbás Effendi, particularly the chapter "Philosophy and Psychology." But whatever his sources may have been, it is impossible not to be struck by some basic similarities between his later philosophy and the central ideas which he postulates as the essence of Baha'ism, especially the concept of Love as the central motif of life.

But the thesis shows no awareness of the role of Ṭáhirih Qurratu'l-'Ayn's martyrdom. How did he become interested in her fate? And where did he find her poem, which he included in his *Jávidnáma*? There were, of course, a number of books dealing with Babism and with martyrs of the faith, and Iqbal was probably acquainted with E.G. Browne's studies of this topic. But the poetry of Qurratu'l-'Ayn was difficult to find. However, there is a clue. Martha Root, in her book *Ṭáhirih the Pure, Iran's Greatest Woman*, tells that in 1930 an ardent Bahá'í in Karachi, Mr. Isfandiár Bakhtiarí, copied the most famous poems of Ṭáhirih and had them printed in an edition of one thousand copies, which were distributed to distinguished people in India. This was soon followed by a second edition. There is no doubt that Iqbal received one of these copies (although I have not checked in his library), and touched by the mellifluous poetry, he introduced Ṭáhirih's most beautiful song through his own work to a wider readership. Interestingly, according to Martha Root, one year after the publication of the *Jávidnáma*, that is in 1933, Hidayat Hosain published an article "A Female Martyr of the Bábí Faith" in the proceedings of the *Dá'ira-yi ma'árif-i Islámiyya*, Lahore, a publication dedicated to the Nizám of Hyderabad. We can, therefore, conclude that the public interested in Persian poetry in Lahore and other cultural centers of India was probably well enough acquainted with the work of Ṭáhirih to recognize her poem in Iqbal's epic, and not to mistake it as Iqbal's own verse.

But Ṭáhirih's beautiful *ghazal* is not the only occasion when she is heard speaking in the *Jávidnáma*. The three noble spirits discuss important theological problems. Ḥalláj tells Iqbal (who has assumed during his heavenly journey the name of Zindarúd) that his sin was that he witnessed, and gave witness, not only

of God's love but also of his power; and even more, that he had tried to bring "resurrection to spiritually dead" people. At the end of his monologue, he warns Iqbál—whom he sees almost as his spiritual disciple—to be aware that one has to pay for such daring undertaking with one's life. Ḥalláj's so-called sin was the attempt to lead people to a spiritual resurrection. In the verse immediately following Ḥalláj's last word, Ṭáhirih takes up the thread and continues his thought:

Out of the sin of the obsessed servant  
A new universe emerges.  
Unlimited longing tears the veils,  
and takes away old age from the vision.

One immediately understands here the allusion to Mauláná Rúmí's "Song of the Reed," in which the flute's tunes "tear our veils," which separate humankind from God and which bar humanity's understanding of the divine source of life.

پرده هایش پرده های ما درید

Ṭáhirih continues in Iqbál's rendering:

Finally he takes his lot from gallows and rope  
and does not return alive from the street of the Friend.

This clearly points to the Ḥalláj-motif, for "gallows and rope" is the standard formula when Persianate poets allude to the secret of Ḥalláj's death at the gallows suffered at the hands of the unfeeling mullás because he dared to divulge the secret of loving union. Likewise, the formula that the true lover does not return alive from the street of his beloved is commonplace in the mystical tradition of Iran and the Subcontinent, and occurs also in Ghálib, who made clever use of the inherited images. In the case of Ṭáhirih, the two lines perfectly express the secret of her suffering and death for the sake of Truth. Ṭáhirih then continues, as Iqbál has it:

See his manifestation in city and desert  
Lest you think that he has passed away from the world.  
He is hidden in the innermost core of his age—  
How could he find room in this seclusion?

The true lover, who, through his death, gives witness not only of his divinely inspired passion but also of the power of longing love itself, is found everywhere: in the city, the dwelling place of sober intellectuals; and in the desert, where demented lovers like Majnún have their home. Such longing, and the



people who embody it, can never disappear from this world; in fact, they are there, in the midst of the present age.

Iqbál has proved with these lines, which express Ṭáhirih's ideals very well, that he still cherished the memory of the martyr-poet of Iran and understood her brave attitude. The whole symbolism of the passage put into her mouth expresses her ardent desire to die for the glory of eternal love.

It should be kept in mind that Iqbál, often accused of not allotting women any room in his ideology of the *mard-i mo'min* and of restricting a woman's role exclusively to that of an obedient wife and mother, has shown here, that he was not that narrow-minded. The fact that he introduces Ṭáhirih into the Jupiter Sphere (as he introduces Princess Sharafu'n-Nisá in Paradise) shows that for him everyone was admirable in whom he witnessed the glow of true love; that he, following the traditional Sufi outlook, admired the woman who was so filled with divine love that she ventured to go out on the difficult path toward her Beloved, that path, which leads inevitably to martyrdom: Ṭáhirih is here, like the heroines of the Sindhí-Panjábí folktales, a true *mard*, a true *tálib al-maulá*, willing to leave everything in this world behind and sacrifice herself for the sake of union and love, of witnessing what she had experienced as being the truth.

The scene in the *Jávidnáma* seems to prove that Iqbál, as much as he changed his philosophical outlook during the years that followed his stay in Europe (after the completion of his dissertation), had maintained his admiration for at least one aspect of Babism-Baha'ism, this "wonderful"—as he calls it—religious development, which may have even influenced some of his central ideas, particularly the idea of the absolute predominance of divine Love in human development. And we know the problem of whether there can be any revelation after Muḥammad, the Seal of the Prophets, had occupied his mind for quite a while. That is proved by the way he introduces Ghálíb's relevant verse in the context of the Sphere of Jupiter, but it is also known from some pieces of his correspondence, and it is here, in connection with the belief in a continuing revelation, that Ṭáhirih had to sacrifice herself, following, as it were, the example of Ḥalláj.

It seems appropriate to close this paper with the very end of Iqbál's dissertation, which—written in 1907—gains a strange relevance in the light of the present situation in Iran:

Pure speculation and dreamy mysticism undergo a powerful check in Babism which, unmindful of persecution, synthesizes all the inherited philosophical and religious tendencies, and rouses the spirit to a consciousness of the stern reality of things. Though extremely cosmopolitan and hence quite unpatriotic in character, it has yet a great influence over the Persian mind. The unmythic character and the practical tone of Babism may have been a remote cause of the progress of recent political reform in Persia.